

# socialist standard

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## Clowns to the left

## Jokers to the right

Stuck  
in the  
middle  
with  
**EU**

**Mao's bomb**  
page 22





# socialist standard

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## Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to



patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic,

Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

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## End not mend capitalism

THE BASIC nature of the society we live in, where we make human relationships, where we contribute with our ideas and our work, also fashions the problems we face. For good reason that society is known as capitalism, historically a developed human arrangement in which a minority class dominates in the exploitation of the rest of us to its own advantage and to enduring frustration and damage to us as humans.

For example a recent survey revealed that a serious health risk is needlessly imposed by the enormous amounts of sugar which are included in what are described as 'fashionable' hot flavoured drinks. This contributes to Britain suffering Europe's highest rate of obesity – a condition which can fertilise a host of menacing illnesses such as diabetes, strokes, osteoarthritis. This highly dangerous addition is actively promoted by the street coffee shops, particularly the likes of Starbucks and Costa Coffee – a situation recently blasted by a Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine as 'scandalous'. Starbucks and Costa, balancing it out with their profits, must

have another word for it.

In another field, also relevant to our health, is a recent report by the Ministry of Justice which revealed that in 2015 in England and Wales a total of 42,728 'households' were forcibly evicted from their homes by bailiffs because they had failed to pay their rent – the highest recorded since records were opened in 2000. This whole matter is a symptom of the most desperately dehumanising effects of poverty – at a time when George Osborne and David Cameron habitually insist that we are luxuriating in the shelter of a 'strong economy'.

The conventional political parties – Conservative, Labour, LibDem, the Greens, UKIP, the Nationalists – strive to persuade us that they have the ability and the intention to wipe out the current problems in society. To this end they produce policies relating to problems such as health, housing, crime, poverty, education, transport, along with less prominent issues such as planning, art and culture.

This is often effective in persuading enough people that they should take

serious notice of their pronouncements, however transparently populist. But for people to do this entails them ignoring the fact that these parties have promised many times before to solve these problems, so that at times the remedies being put forward clash with those in the past. It also entails ignoring the vital – indeed crucial – fact that, as these problems are engendered by the capitalist system itself, they cannot be solved within its framework of minority ownership and production for profit, a system which all these parties uphold in one form or another.

In contrast, the Socialist Party is an organisation which is distinctive through its principle of refusing to promise to ease the problems of capitalism as they are inevitable results of that social system's basic nature. Our objective is the abolition of capitalism and its replacement with socialism – a classless, moneyless society based on common ownership – a universal system which cannot exist separately in Britain or any other part of the world.

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## Great men of straw

ITEMS in the news last month included a NASA report that April was the seventh month in a row to break global temperature records, that five Solomon Islands have now disappeared underwater, that the Arctic is warming four times faster than the rest of the planet, and that the first ever global assessment, from botanists at London's Kew Gardens, has declared that 21 percent of *all plant species* are now under threat of extinction.

This litany of climate-related misery was not in the least relieved by news that politicians have completed the business of ratifying the Paris Climate accord, whereby the world's nations will join arm-in-arm and shoulder-to-shoulder to fight climate change with their combined unstoppable forces of piety, chewed lips and crossed fingers.

It surely won't be just socialists who, on reading the paper every morning, have that familiar Solomon-sinking feeling that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket and nobody, especially not the capitalist politicians, has a blind clue what to do about it.

It's anybody's guess what effect climate change will have on global politics in the future. Perhaps the world will look over the precipice and experience a dramatic epiphany and adopt world socialism in a process which the German sociologist Ulrich Beck described as 'emancipatory catastrophism' (*New Scientist*, 30 April). Somehow though we don't think so. The best way to make a house habitable is not to burn it down first.

An interesting clue about climatic effects in history was reported recently by a team of volcanologists and historians who looked at events in Roman history from around 250 BC and matched them with evidence (from Antarctic ice cores et al) of volcanic eruptions (*New Scientist*, 7 May). The team claims a close correlation

between eruptions and domestic uprisings in Ptolemaic Egypt, due to poor rainfall in the Ethiopian uplands and corresponding flood failures in the Nile valley, leading to failed harvests. They argue that eight out of ten documented revolts against the Ptolemaic rulers started within two years of an eruption. Ultimately, runs the reasoning, this weakening of Egypt led to the defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BC, which opened the way for the Augustan Empire and the beginnings of the modern western world.

You can argue the pros and cons of this fun idea. Clearly the modern world doesn't owe its origins to the teleological absurdity of a couple of volcanoes going off pop at crucial moments. For one thing, Egypt was not especially weak, economically speaking, as was shown by the fact that Marc Anthony stopped the supply of Egyptian grain, upon which Rome heavily relied, in order to blackmail the Senate. As for Actium, Octavian's general Agrippa probably ought to have some credit, and besides it may just be that the Egyptians were never that great at winning sea battles - if you look at a Wikipedia list of ancient naval battles, there are numerous Egyptian naval defeats and the only instance of a victory was c 1190 BC against an unidentified opponent (the 'Sea Peoples'), making the event more legend than fact.

Quibbles aside, the thing to note in all this is that you never hear anybody, scientist or historian or for that matter the bloke down the pub, nowadays saying things like 'That Augustus (or maybe Julius Caesar) was a genius, you know, we wouldn't be anywhere today without him.' It's worth noting this because in early Victorian times the dominant view was somewhat different, as summed up by Thomas Carlyle: 'the history of the world is but the biography of great men' (and he meant *men*). This 'heroic' view, set out in his 1841 book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, gave scant consideration to social conditions, economic affairs or other environmental circumstances and instead saw history rather like a mute and passive baton passed from one hero to the next, to do with as they saw fit. The only reason to study history, as Carlyle saw it, was

to understand heroes like Muhammad, Pericles or Napoleon in order to behave more like them.

The obvious fact that most people are not in a position to behave like these 'heroes' (and would be locked up in a psyche ward if they did) means that they don't count for anything at all and are written out of history as irrelevant. Small wonder then that the heroic view flattered the conceits of the bourgeoisie and was also popular with intellectuals like Kierkegaard, Thoreau, Hegel and Nietzsche.

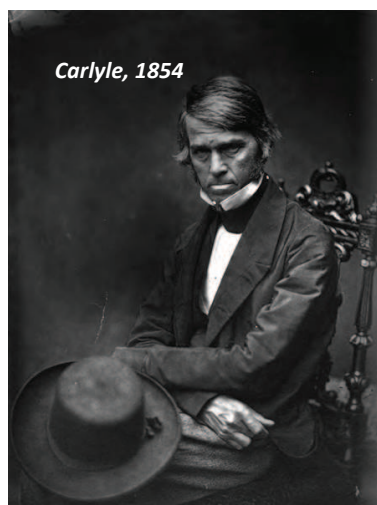
Not everyone was persuaded. Herbert Spencer considered the heroic view as bordering on infantile and responded furiously that 'before he (the great man) can remake his society, his society must make him', an argument that socialists more generally associate with Karl Marx and the materialist conception of history.

In the materialist view, change can occur due to many non-material factors, whether social, psychological (or heroic), cultural or historical, but economic conditions tend usually to be the crucial and generally decisive factor. Marx used the terms base and superstructure, and we can envisage this as a piece of land with buildings on it. Thus, a fire in an upper storey of one cultural building (say paedophile scandals in the Catholic Church) might have some small effect on other structures but none at all on the material foundations of society. In contrast, an earthquake in the economic base, the land itself, would certainly upset all the cultural structures built on top of it.

O tempora, o mores. Nowadays the materialist perspective has achieved orthodoxy among academic historians (Carlyle would be flunked out of college), while workers in general are conspicuously divided between materialists on the one hand and hero-worshippers on the other. This is a big problem because how you look at history deeply influences what you intend to do and can expect to achieve in the future.

Materialists ought to be socialists because they instinctively grasp that real change can only occur through a shaking up of the economic base of society, or what we call revolution. The hero-worshippers continue to hope in the face of all the

evidence for a hero to emerge and save them, in the form of some politician or demagogue, and are thus grasping at nothing at all except straws and straw men. **PJS**



## The vote or twitter?

Dear Editors,

Here's a polemical question for the readers of the *Socialist Standard*: 'Do we now have more power as consumers, texters, and members of the Twitteratti, than we have as mere voters?'

We know that our so-called leaders and their camp followers in the political chatteratti are increasingly out of touch and that Napoleon's dictum 'the people are just three hot meals away from revolution' has never been more apt. You only need to substitute the words pay-day loan, mortgage re-payment, zero-hours contract, health emergency, or pension crisis. And there you have it – life in contemporary Britain for millions of people.

We even have a new social type – the superfluous graduate, someone with no future who works in a dystopian culture where you practically need a degree to be an employee in shoe shop. There is now a tidal wave of tertiary educated youth enslaved by student debt, stuck in a never-ending series of McJobs – with low wages, poor conditions, short-term, temporary contracts, no pensions, no benefits, no security, and next to no job satisfaction. This group knows full well that it's only the sons and daughters of the privileged 1 percent who can take on those unpaid internships which lead to secure, well-paid, fulfilling careers. Unpaid internships are also a great deal for the bosses. Unlike the old-time slave owners they don't even need to house, feed, or clothe their workers!

The 99 percent also understand that the concept of social mobility is dead and that many of them will be the first generation in their family's history to be less prosperous, less contented, less healthy, and die younger than their parents.

When will the electorate collectively realize that they have no more choice in our political leaders than in our selection of baked bean brands? We can only buy what's placed on the supermarket shelf. Or, in the case of our dysfunctional voting system, the candidates who are shortlisted for the rest of us by the corporations, the media, and the 1 percenters.

The old joke that if democracy really changed anything they wouldn't allow it, has never held more meaning – we pretend to vote and they pretend to govern. Have political parties been reduced to useful tools which the political establishment then use to shape the proletariat? If the Right is the hammer, then has the Left just become an anvil?

If so, is the game is up for democracy

and what will the coming revolution look like for the remaining 99 percent in the age of the internet? Won't political parties become increasingly irrelevant and eventually redundant if our only real power comes via our functions as consumers, texters, and members of the online Twitteratti? Please note – I'm not saying this is a good thing – but just a reality of the human condition in the age of new technology.

If so, then it's obvious, to have real power we must simply stop feeding the beast. The only fear for the corporate plutocracy is the disruption that would ensue if we simply stopped consuming en masse and paralyzed the economic system. Their worst nightmare is a text message that goes viral and calls for a boycott of a particular company or product. Imagine if millions of people stopped banking at RBS, ceased filling their petrol tanks at Shell, or refused to buy Coca-Cola – if only for a few weeks.

Think this could never happen? Wrong, it's already happening! Using the website Change.org a customer of Verizon Wireless organized an online petition garnering over 165,000 signatures which within hours forced the company to back down on its plans to introduce a \$2 'convenience' charge for the rip-off 'privilege' of paying bills by phone or online. A similar ploy received over 300,000 supporters and defeated Bank of America's avaricious scam for a \$5 usage fee for credit cards.

This is just the beginning – consumers have barely begun to flex their internet muscles. If there is a political manifesto for today it must read: 'We the people simply demand a sharing of the wealth, a sustainable economy which preserves the environment, the dissolution of central power, a guarantee of personal freedoms, and an end to corrupt corporate power elites'.

**TED NEWCOMEN (by email from USA)**

**Reply:** It's one thing to organise a quick online petition to achieve a very limited aim, like defeating a \$2 administration charge, or as recently in the UK, obliging a major financial institution to revoke a silly dress code insisting on high heels for female staff. Lots of people will sign a petition because it takes a second and costs nothing. Meanwhile the companies concerned probably don't much care about such trivial details anyway and are quite likely to back down in the face of popular pressure. But try starting a petition over something non-trivial, like forcing banks to abolish loan interest payments, and see how far you get. Just because something seems to work on the small scale doesn't mean it will scale up. Petitions just ask politely and then give up when ignored. Revolution doesn't ask, it takes.

But revolution involves effort and patience and a certain amount of grit, while the enduring appeal of consumer politics is that it requires no understanding, no effort and very little commitment. In politics whatever takes no effort generally has no effect. 'Consumerism' ignores this and presents itself as a magic solution that anyone can do, but the claims made for it do not square with reality. We as consumers can always switch brands but we can't opt out of being consumers, unless we're going to refuse to eat or wear clothes or heat our homes. So we'll never have the power to influence the basic operations of capitalism that way. But we as workers, however, do have power, not through what we buy but through what we create, whether goods or services, because we can always refuse to create it. A consumer boycott? The oligarchs can survive that. That's not the nightmare that keeps them awake at night. A workers' revolution is what they're really scared of.

The saying 'if democracy really changed anything they wouldn't allow it' is indeed old, but that doesn't make it true. It does reflect the experienced fact that 'changing governments changes nothing' but this is not the fault of political democracy. It is because governments govern in the context of capitalism and capitalism can never be made to work in the interest of the majority as it is based on minority ownership and production for their profit.

The saying is also wrong in suggesting that political democracy is something that the ruling class can choose to allow or not. Universal suffrage is something that workers had to struggle for against the ruling class and which they had to impose on them. The oligarchs have since learned to adapt to and manipulate it and they now find it a useful way to choose governments to run things on their behalf and also to bring an air of legitimacy to their rule. All the same, it remains a gain for the majority class of wage and salary workers and a weapon we can use to dislodge them.

You ask us to consider what would happen if millions stopped banking with one particular bank or refused to buy one particular brand of fizzy drink. We ask you to consider what would happen if millions stopped voting for pro-capitalist politicians and used the power the vote gives them to elect instead delegates mandated to use political power to end capitalism and usher in a classless society of common ownership and democratic control. – *Editors*.



# Halo Halo

## Angry Christians, Hot Dogs and Venezuela

'A MAJORITY of millennials now reject capitalism' reported the *Washington Post* (26 April 2016) after a recent Harvard University poll concluded that 51 percent of people between 18 and 29 do not support the system and only 42 percent said they did. More interestingly, 33 percent said they supported socialism.

Let's not start winding up the World Socialist Movement just yet though, our job isn't quite done. The *Washington Post* pointed out that 'Capitalism can mean different things to different people', and noted 'Bernie Sanders is profoundly changing how millennials think about politics'. Ah, Bernie Sanders, that American capitalist politician who thinks he's a socialist. Perhaps someone should inform the *Washington Post* that 'Socialism', too, means different things to different people.

Whether the rightwing *Christian Post* website has been bamboozled by Bernie, too, is not clear but some joker seems to have told them that socialism has been established in Venezuela and they're not happy about it. And that Harvard poll has pushed them right over the edge. Anyone browsing their website be warned, you can almost feel their anger and indignation blasting its way through cyberspace and smashing against the inside of your computer screen.

This survey, they say, 'goes to show you that higher education can't fix stupid – especially when it's flowing from the mouths of anti-capitalist educators'. 'These educators' they go on, 'take advantage of their captive audiences, rambling on with their vast "knowledge," mistaking the blank stares and half-smiles in the room as "interest" having no idea that if they heard themselves in playback, they'd probably stab themselves with their pointing sticks'.

And we thought Christians were such nice, peaceful people. 'Before all you anti-capitalists jump on the socialist bandwagon', they warn us, 'why not first take a look at what's happening in Venezuela, that pitiful place on the globe where it takes a wheel barrel full of cash to buy a hot dog'. Ah, hot dogs are involved. No wonder they're angry.

'I know American socialists are far above eating hot dogs' their writer explains, 'and probably prefer munching on exotic tree bark, but if a hot dog is what's available thanks to your beloved socialism, needing a wheel barrel full of cash to buy one is a bit much, wouldn't you say?'

It descends into a bit of an incoherent rant after that, although a few paragraphs later we do get a clue about their anger or, at least, their confusion.

Still seething about nasty university lecturers who, although they don't actually blame them for the economic situation in Venezuela, they do hold responsible for the result of the Harvard poll, and inform us, 'Venezuela happened – amidst their attempts to paint a rosy picture of socialism, omitting from their lectures

historical facts about the collapse of communism in the Eastern bloc'.

Well, *Christian Post*, here's a historical fact for you. There was no communism or socialism in Russia and the Eastern bloc, or in Venezuela for that matter. What they had in Russia, and in Venezuela was just another form of capitalism – administered by the state instead of by big business. And, as we saw in Russia, state administered capitalism is just as useless as private capitalism.

As for your concerns that 'The International Monetary fund says this year Venezuela's inflation rate will rise to 500% while other experts predict 700%. That's why you need wheel barrels loaded with worthless cash to buy hot dogs'. Well, that's capitalism for you – private or state run. And, we seem to recall, capitalist America too had a bit of a depression back in the 1930s.

And more recently (See wikipedia. org/wiki/Poverty\_in\_the\_United\_States) 'Recent census data shows that half the population qualifies as poor or low income, with one in five millennials living in poverty' and 'In 2011 child poverty reached record high levels, with 16.7 million children living in food insecure households'.

Rest assured, when we have real socialism, even in America you won't need a wheel barrel (or wheelbarrow as we call them on this side of the pond) to collect your hot dog – you just won't be that hungry.

Pass that on to Bernie, will you?

NW



## The EU and the price of food

IN THE argument over whether to Leave or Remain in the EU is in the better overall interest of British capitalism, which the media and politicians are urging us to get embroiled in, the Remain side would arguably seem to have the stronger case – from a capitalist point of view that is, of course.

British capitalism benefits from unrestricted access to the single European market and also from having a say in drawing up its rules and regulations. It also benefits from being part of a large trading bloc in negotiations with other states and blocs, on the same principle behind trade unionism that 'unity is strength': you can get a better deal when negotiating as a group rather than individually.

But these are not the only arguments that the Remain camp are using. In April the Treasury published a study on what things would be like in 2030 if British capitalism leaves. Apparently, we'll all be £4300 a year worse off. This is mere fantasy economics, as the Leave camp were quick to point out, including

ex-Cabinet minister, Ian Duncan-Smith, who said that governments can't predict what's going to happen even a year ahead, citing Chancellor Osborne's revision in March of the growth predictions in his previous year's budget. We have always made the same point but can't recall any politician making it when in government.

Then there is the claim in one of the 'Britain Stronger in Europe' leaflets that British capitalism being in the EU is 'great for families with lower prices in our shops thanks to free trade.' This is not true as there is 'free trade' only within the EU. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, the EU is a customs union which imposes tariffs on goods from outside it, in particular agricultural products. This means higher food prices; which was one reason why some were opposed to British capitalism joining in the first place in 1973.

This is still the case, as Gerard Lyons, of Economists for Brexit, pointed out:

'There is a tariff wall around the EU that protects agriculture, largely for the benefit of France, and parts of manufacturing, because of Germany. In these protected areas, people pay higher prices than in world markets' (*Times*, 6 May).

So, if British capitalism left (and if it is

decided not to protect UK farmers – a big if) there would be lower food prices. But this would not benefit workers. We've been here before, in the 1840s when there was a campaign to repeal the Corn Laws which imposed tariffs on the import of corn which benefitted landowners who creamed off as higher rents the increase in the price of what their farmer tenants sold.

The capitalist opponents of the Corn Laws sought working class support by saying it would bring lower food prices, but, as the more astute trade unionists of the time realised, this would not benefit workers since, by lowering the cost of living, it would lead to lower wages, leaving workers no better off.

Engels, who used to hobnob with Manchester capitalists in the 1840s, wrote in 1881 that 'there was no secret made, in those times, of what was aimed at by the repeal of the Corn Laws. To reduce the price of bread, and thereby the monetary rate of wages', so as to increase the competitiveness of British capitalism on world markets or, as Engels said the British manufacturers put it, to enable them 'to defy all and every competition with which wicked or ignorant foreigners threatened them' (*Labour Standard*, 18 June). Which is how the Leave camp is still putting it today.



# Goldsmith versus Khan

SPARE A thought for Zac Goldsmith. For Frank Zacharias Robin 'Zac' Goldsmith. For the son of a proliferous billionaire who left him to struggle through life on an inheritance of between two hundred and three hundred million pounds, which represented a monthly income of about £5 million. For the pupil at Eton – until they found for bidden drugs in his room. For one so convincing as a self-promoted defender of the natural world that his uncle gave him the magazine *The Ecologist* to do with what he liked, even to appoint himself as its editor. For the triumphantly victorious MP for Richmond Park Green against the industrious Lib Dem Susan Kramer. But one whose smooth rise up the Greasy Pole was obstructed when he devoted his talents and his riches to a campaign for election as Mayor of London – in which he was thwarted by the distinctly non-legatee Labour candidate Sadiq Khan. Thus Goldsmith's case for election was not as elegantly appealing as those Richmond Tories must have assumed it would be and his copious ambitions were reduced to a state of baffled suspension. So spare a thought for him.



## Argumentative

And for Sadiq Khan who stood as the underdog against the handsome, elegant Goldsmith. He could hardly have been more different for he is the youngest of five children whose grandparents came from Pakistan to take root in council housing in one of the rougher parts of London. His father was a bus driver and his mother a seamstress. Working his way through university Khan qualified as a solicitor, specialising in cases concerning human rights – which often brought him into conflict with the police (a teacher at his comprehensive school had advised him that his 'argumentative personality' made him a natural to study law instead of dentistry as he intended). In 2005, after

a spell as a councillor in Wandsworth, he became the MP for Tooting and in 2009, when he was made Minister of State for Transport under Gordon Brown, he was the first Muslim to attend the Cabinet. He then held a succession of shadow ministerial posts under Ed Miliband. In this process he was establishing a number of records, often related to being a Muslim but including such as regularly being placed by the *Evening Standard* among the Top 100 London politicians and, in 2005, awarded the 'Newcomer Of The Year' by the *Spectator* for '...the tough-mindedness and clarity with which he has spoken out about the very difficult issues of Islamic terror'. But none of these counted as crucial in the battle against Zac Goldsmith for the London Mayoralty. No matter that Kahn could offer the usual promises: against this was the slickness of Goldsmith's office and his experienced media advisers with their well-honed voting strategies.

## Terrorists

But this was a case when those experts in the dog-whistle style of voter-manipulation placed themselves in a position which was evidently ill-advised. For they seemed to have decided that as Sadiq Khan is a Muslim there were votes to be won by associating him with the terrorist operations which are among the current problems across the world. One



example of this appeared when the *Guardian* of 30 April publicised a letter written by David Cameron to Anita Vasisht who is a lawyer specialising in immigration problems. Cameron warned that any policy resulting from the united efforts of Jeremy Corbyn and Sadiq Khan would bring about a situation in which 'Londoners will become lab rats in a giant political experiment'. The implication of this was more obvious in a letter from David Cameron to another lawyer which stated that only Goldsmith could be relied on to '...keep our streets safe from terrorist attacks'. At the same time, and on the same theme, there was Boris Johnson in the *Daily Telegraph* accusing Sadiq Khan of '...pandering to the extremists. I don't want him running our capital'. And Teresa May, whose earliest claim to fame

was when she denounced the Tories as 'the nasty party', warning their spring conference that Khan would be 'unsafe' to run London when it faced '...a significant threat of terrorism'. These attacks on Khan as a Muslim terrorist were not entirely welcome in the Tory party. Their ex-chair Baroness Warsi later referred to the election loss as a result as an 'appalling dog-whistle campaign' which 'lost us the election, our reputation and credibility on issues of race and religion'. Steve Hilton, previously infamous as the party's election master mind, regretted that it had brought back that 'nasty party label to the Conservatives'.

## Milkman

The overall effect of this, with the ominous survey ratings which gave Khan a solid lead, may have persuaded those Tory strategists to try another style of deceit, by sending Goldsmith out in the early morning disguised as a milkman on his rounds. However Goldsmith was not travelling in one of those snuffling battery floats but in a posh black limousine. We were supposed to believe that he was delivering that milk to what looked like some posh mews in a place like Kensington. But of course one effect of this waste arouse those well-used, long-ago slogans about Thatcher The Milk Snatcher.

Sadiq Khan became the new Mayor of London by defeating Zac Goldsmith by 14 percentage points. From the piracy that is now the Labour Party he may emerge as their new leader. Meanwhile he must make his mark through some particular policies which he claims will adjust, or even eliminate, the merciless realities which distort the lives and the wellbeing of what are called ordinary hard-working citizens. At present there are few surprises in these; for example an intention to build genuinely affordable homes; to ensure that the streets of London are cleaner, safer. There is one novelty in the introduction of a new public transport ticket known as the Hopper which at first threatens to require harassed commuters to become mathematically agile as they are about to board the bus or the train. London is a great example of capitalism in sordid operation with its proliferation of social dislocation and hopeless responses. The election struggle between Sadiq Khan and Zac Goldsmith was no more than another rejected opportunity for the people in this part of the world to begin the historical change for the better.

IVAN.



## UK BRANCHES & CONTACTS

### LONDON

**North London branch.** Meets 3rd Thurs. 8pm at Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Ave, NW5 2RX. Contact: 020 7609 0983 chris.dufton@talktalk.net

**South London branch.** Meets last Saturday in month, 7pm. Head Office, 52 Clapham High St, SW4 7UN. Contact: 020 7622 3811.

**West London branch.** Meets 1st & 3rd Tues. 8pm. Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace (corner Sutton Court Rd), W4. Corres: 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY. Contact: 020 8740 6677. tennar@abelgratis.com

### MIDLANDS

**West Midlands regional branch.** Meets last Sun. 3pm (check before attending). Contact: vincent. otter@globalnet.co.uk. 01242 675357.  
**East Midlands.** Contact: Gareth Whitley, gwhitley@hotmail.co.uk

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**Northeast branch.** Contact: Vin Maratty, 22 Greystoke Avenue, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR2 9DS. vinmaratty@googlemail.com. 01915 250 002.

**Lancaster branch.** Meets 3rd Sun. 3pm. Contact: P. Shannon, 10 Green Street, Lancaster LA1 1DZ. 01524 382380 spgb.lancaster@worldsocialism.org.

**Manchester branch.** Contact: Paul Bennett, 6 Burleigh Mews, Hardy Lane, M21 7LB. 0161 860 7189.

**Southeast Manchester.** Contact: Blanche Preston, 68 Fountains Road, M32 9PH.

**Bolton.** Contact: H. McLaughlin. 01204 844589.  
**Cumbria.** Contact: Brendan Cummings, 19 Queen St, Millom, Cumbria LA18 4BG.

**Yorkshire regional branch.** Contact: Edward Craggs, Sutton Farm, Aldborough, Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, YO51 9ER. 01423 322781. ralph.craggs@gmail.com.

### SOUTH/SOUTHEAST/SOUTHWEST

**Kent and Sussex regional branch.** Meets 2nd Sun. 2pm at The Muggleton Inn, High Street, Maidstone ME14 1HJ. Contact: spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org 07973 142701.

**South West regional branch.** Meets 2nd Sat of even months. Railway Tavern, Salisbury, 2pm (check before attending). Contact: Shane

Roberts, 86 High Street, Bristol BS5 6DN. 0117 9511199.

**Brighton Discussion Group.** Contact: Anton Pruden, anton@pruden.me

**Canterbury.** Contact: Rob Cox, 4 Stanhope Road, Deal, Kent, CT14 6AB.

**Luton.** Contact: Nick White, 59 Heywood Drive, LU2 7LP.

**Redruth.** Contact: Harry Sowden, 5 Clarence Villas, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 1PB. 01209 219293.

**East Anglian regional branch.** Meets 2nd Sat. on alternate months (see 'Meetings' for details). Contact: Pat Deutz, 11 The Links, Billerica, CM12 0EX. n.deutz@btinternet.com. David Porter, Eastholme, Bush Drive, Eccleson-on-Sea, NR12 0SF. 01692 582533. Richard Headicar, 42 Woodcote, Firs Rd, Hethersett, NR9 3JD. 01603 814343.

**Cambridge.** Contact: Andrew Westley, 10 Marksby Close, Duxford, Cambridge CB2 4RS. 07890343044.

### IRELAND

**Cork.** Contact: Kevin Cronin, 5 Curragh Woods, Frankfield, Cork. 021 4896427.

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**Newtownabbey.** Contact: Nigel McCullough. 028 90852062.

### SCOTLAND

**Edinburgh branch.** Meets 1st Thurs. 7-9pm.

The Quaker Hall, Victoria Terrace (above Victoria Street), Edinburgh. Contact: J. Moir. 0131 440 0995. JIMMY@jmoir29.freemove.co.uk Branch website: http://geocities.com/edinburghbranch/

**Glasgow branch.** Meets 3rd Weds. at 7pm in Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow. Contact: Peter Hendrie, 75 Lairhills Road, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0LH. 01355 903105. peter.anna.hendrie@blueyonder.co.uk.

**Dundee.** Contact: Ian Ratcliffe, 12 Finlow Terrace, Dundee, DD4 9NA. 01382 698297.

**Ayrshire.** Contact: Paul Edwards 01563 541138. rainbow3@btopenworld.com.

**Lothian Socialist Discussion** @Autonomous Centre Edinburgh, ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA. Meets 4th Weds. 7-9pm. Contact: F.Anderson 07724 082753.

### WALES

**Swansea branch.** Meets 2nd Mon, 7.30pm, Unitarian Church, High Street. Contact: Geoffrey Williams, 19 Baptist Well Street, Waun Wen, Swansea SA1 6FB. 01792 643624.

**Cardiff and District.** Contact: Richard Botterill, 21 Pen-Y-Bryn Rd, Gabalfa, Cardiff, CF14 3LG. 02920-615826. botterillr@gmail.com

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**Denmark.** Contact: Graham Taylor, Kjaerslund 9, Floor 2 (middle), DK-8260 Viby J.

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**Norway.** Contact: Robert Stafford.hallblithe@yahoo.com

**Italy.** Contact: Gian Maria Freddi, Via Felice Casorati n. 6A, 37131 Verona.

**Spain.** Contact: Alberto Gordillo, Avenida del Parque. 2/2/3 Puerta A, 13200 Manzanares.

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## Give Us The Vote

THE RIGHT to vote matters little if you can't cast your vote. On the basis of its claim to be defenders of democracy one would expect the United States of America to be in the forefront of encouraging participation in the electoral process since voting is held up as the foundation of democracy. Over 100 million Americans will cast a ballot in November's presidential election but many will face disenfranchisement — those without IDs, those convicted of crimes, those that need to work, those that can't find childcare, those that can't travel, and often this disenfranchisement is deliberate. In 2008, the Supreme Court opened the door to more restrictive voting procedures when it upheld an Indiana law that required all voters casting a ballot in person to present a federal or Indiana photo ID. Since 2010, many other states have either introduced restrictive voter procedures or tightened up those in operation. Events are, of course, currently unfolding as legal challenges are being made to restrictive laws.

The American Civil Liberties Union noted that new restrictions on voting will affect up to 80 million and critics argue that photo ID laws create a financial barrier to the ballot box. Former Attorney General Eric Holder compared the laws to a poll tax during the 'Jim Crow Era' when Southern states imposed voting fees, to discourage blacks from voting. About 11 percent of U.S. citizens, or roughly 21 million citizens, don't have government-issued photo ID and many people in rural areas have trouble accessing ID offices. Obtaining photo ID can be costly and burdensome. While many states with strict laws offer a free state ID, these require documents like a birth certificate that can cost up to \$25. Researchers found that states with a strict photo ID law saw a significant decrease in turnout among minority and immigrant voters and an increased gap between white and non-white voters.

Some states are also trimming back or eliminating measures which bolster electoral participation by minority and younger voters. Eight states have enacted new laws cutting back on early voting days and hours. In 2013, North Carolina reduced early voting days from 17 to 10, ended the ability to register and cast a vote on the same day and abolished a pre-registration programme for 16- and 17-year-olds. But one of the major

barriers to universal suffrage is the disenfranchisement of ex-prisoners. The Constitution permits states to adopt rules about

disenfranchisement 'for participation in rebellion, or other crime' [our emphasis], by the Fourteenth Amendment. Individual states themselves decide which crimes could be grounds for disenfranchisement so laws vary from state to state. There were 1.2 million in 1976 denied the right to vote due to felony disenfranchisement. In 2008 over 5.3 million people. Nationally in 2012, an estimated 5.85 million Americans are denied the vote because of laws that prohibit voting by people with felony convictions.

Due to the racial disparities in the criminal justice system, this has resulted in one in every thirteen African Americans unable to vote. The disenfranchisement of felons was used by Southern states combined with other tactics to neutralise the black electorate, in the wake of the Fifteenth Amendment, which ostensibly guaranteed African Americans the vote. A study found that the larger the state's black population, the more likely the state was to pass the most stringent laws that permanently denied people convicted of crimes the right to vote. In three states (Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia) by 2014, more than one in five black adults were disenfranchised. Very different from Maine and Vermont where there is no significant black population and who have placed no restrictions on voting rights for people convicted and actually allow inmates to vote from prison (something the UK still doesn't.)

Felony disenfranchisement is an obstacle to participation in civic life. Conditions have improved for at least 200,000 Virginian ex-felons who have served their time and had their right to vote restored by the Governor. He explained, 'These individuals have completed their sentences. They have atoned for their actions. They live, work and raise families in communities all across the commonwealth, and they will continue to contribute to our communities, but they now will do it with the full rights of citizens.'

The socialist position upon all this is that we can fully expect sections of the ruling class to gerrymander elections to protect their interests but as long as the system is sufficiently democratic to provide a mandate from the majority and reflect the will of the majority then we will make use of what exists, warts and all.

ALJO

# In? Out? Big Business or Little England?

*In the run-up to the referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Union, we assess the views of the Far Left on this 'vital' issue.*

**A**lthough divided into 57 or more mutually antagonistic sects, an ever-expanding sea of alphabet soup, many of them put up a surprisingly united front.

## What say ye, oh my brothers?



**SWP:** We say OUT! Although diminished from its pre-Delta days, the Socialist Worker's Party (*Socialist Worker*) is still the largest of the Left groupings. As such, it very much sets the pace in regards to

the 'questions of the day'. Its pamphlet, *The EU, a left case for exit*, gives a good account of the nature of the European Union. The dedication to neo-liberal economic policies, such as the infliction of austerity misery on the Greek people and widespread privatisation in the interest of the 'fat cats', is made clear. Equally, the creation of a murderous Fortress Europe policy to keep out migrants is spelt out, as is the fact that the EU is no source of progressive social reform. To weaken 'British Imperialism' vote no.

**RS21/ Counterfire:** We say OUT! These meaningless SWP splinters follow the example of their older brother.



**SPEW:** We say OUT! The 'Socialist' Party of England and Wales (formerly the Militant Tendency) (paper: *The Socialist*) says 'We call for a vote to leave the capitalist EU, and

to build a socialist Europe' for much the same reasons as its arch rivals. They may not have noticed but their much-vaunted construction project has not even got to the planning stage. The choice on the ballot paper is not between a 'socialist' (whatever nonsense that might mean to them) Europe and a capitalist Europe but between a capitalist UK as a member of the capitalist EU and a capitalist stand-alone UK. SPEW takes no part in the Lexit group, the anti-EU campaign group formed on 13 April.

**CPB:** We say OUT! The third (maybe second) largest Left party has an influence beyond its size due to its activism within the unions. Its pamphlet *Britain and the EU: What next?* sets out the pro-business agenda of the EU, its anti-democratic nature (pots and kettles?), the decline and fall of Delors' Social Europe, pro-US origins as a political version of NATO, war-mongering interference in Ukraine and Yugoslavia. The Communist Party of Britain is the prime mover in Lexit. CPB General Secretary Robert Griffith is the group's chairman. To be fair, although the CPB are nay sayers, a fair crack of the whip is given to the INNERS in the CPB associated *Morning Star*.



**CPBML:** We say OUT (very loudly)! In a large and glossy handout, this group of 'anti-revisionists' say "Out of the EU!"

The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), producer of *Workers*, is notorious for its nationalist stance. Much talk is there of 'our country.' Our country? No, *Their country!* Nation is a capitalist concept. They own, they

control: We are their slaves who must break our mental programming. The workers of the world have no country. Even by Left standards, this group is a disgrace.

**CL:** We say OUT! The Communist League, an intrusion into the UK of the American *Militant* Trotskyists, succinctly state 'the challenge facing workers is to see our independent class interests... not to look to the capitalist rulers for protection – be they inside or outside the EU'. Quite right but this doesn't stop them voting OUT.



**NCP:** We say OUT! The (not so) New Communist Party (*New Worker*) leaflet *The truth about the EU* features a cartoon of a trio of what look like B-17s bombing a town of peaceful demonstrators. While no one can ignore the neoliberal agenda of the EU, such alarmism is rather over the top. NATO is not at all the same thing.

**SL/B:** We say OUT! The Spartacist League/Britain, the Sparts, once known for their chanting, with publication *Workers Hammer*, decry the European Union as the 'Enemy of Workers and Immigrants' (aren't migrants workers too?). But in or out austerity and racist anti-migrant policies will continue.



**WRP:** We say OUT! The orthodox Trotskyist Workers' Revolutionary Party (daily paper: *News Line*, its masthead strangely *Sun*-like) says Vote Leave to 'bring down the broken Cameron government...'

bring in a workers government'. A likely outcome – we don't think. And, plural or singular, workers don't need governing.

**CPGB-ML:** We say OUT! Noisy and unapologetically Stalinist, the Communist Party of Great Britain Marxist-Leninist (paper: *Proletarian*), consider Brexit will 'weaken British, European and even US imperialism' (i.e., providing opportunities for Chinese, Russian and Arab imperialism) 'taking our struggle for socialism one small step forward' (or making not a blind bit of difference).

**RCPB(ML):** We say OUT! The Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), (*Line of March*), holds that 'working people themselves must set the agenda'. Quite right too. Yet the agenda of the referendum has already been set by the ruling class. By voting in their referendum, we are playing their game.

**SLP:** We say OUT! Scargill's Socialist Labour Party 'lambasts' the 'free movement of both labour and capital' and boosts import controls on goods and people. The less said about this (especially the latter) the better.

**ISLP:** We say OUT! The Independent Socialist Labour Party – an anti-Scargill Scargillite – also go for the OUT vote.



**RESPECT:** I say OUT! The fan club of the man with the hat call the EU an 'undemocratic plutocracy, a bankers' Europe'. And is not the UK an undemocratic plutocracy, a bankers' paradise? And did not the gorgeous one rethink his views after being booed when sharing a platform with Farage? He did not.





### Against the flow

**RCG:** The Revolutionary Communist Group, very active backsliders from Trotskyism, is yet to declare. The publishers of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* seem to have little interest - presumably because the effects on its beloved Irish, Palestinian, etc, etc, nationalism and Cuban state capitalism are negligible.

**IMT:** The International Marxist Tendency issuing *Socialist Appeal*, still boring within the Labour Party, are hedging their bets. 'The task of Marxists... is not to come out in favour for either reactionary camp'. So neither an IN or an OUT. That's a good start.

**Workers Power:** After nicely contrasting the 'racist and chauvinist OUT campaigners' to the 'pro-capitalist/ neoliberal IN campaigners', the fighters for a Fifth International (as if four weren't bad enough) say IN! Workers Power (publishing the pleasantly pink *Red Flag*) is now entryist in the Labour Party. Which is an IN. Strange huh?

**SR:** Socialist Resistance 'Ecosocialist Feminist Revolutionary' are INNERS. Leader Alan Thornett simplistically aligns Europe and manufacturing (good) and US and finance capital (bad). Although the drawbacks of the European Union are noted, they call for the opposite vote to the chief leavers, UKIP and the "Tory Right" (aren't they all).

**AWL:** The Alliance for Worker's Liberty (*Solidarity*) stands for an IN vote, saying, in particular, it reduces 'nationalist antagonisms'. The AWL has always used hostility and contradictoriness to create a clear red line between it and the other Left groups. Its reasoning on this issue seems a little half-hearted.

**SEP:** Socialist Equality Party are for an active boycott. 'No to the European Union - No to British nationalism!' Fair enough. 'For the unity of the British and European working class!' And of the world, one might add. 'For the United Socialist States of Europe!' This slogan, thought up by Trotsky himself, has been used by INNERS and OUTERS and, here, by abstainers.

**CPGB:** The Communist Party of Great Britain (journal: *Weekly Worker*) also recommends a boycott of the referendum. Its essentially tactical reasons include opposition to British nationalism, opposition to the EU as a capitalist body, as well as a theoretical opposition to referenda as undemocratic.



### How would 'Brexit' affect the working class in Britain?

**Capitalism: No change.** The European Union is just as dedicated to free market capitalism and neoliberalism as the British government is or is likely to be. The latter's austerity programme, independently arrived at and carried out, is just as brutal as the one that the EU imposed on Greece.

**Working conditions: No change.** For the average worker, in terms of pay and conditions, the benefits of membership or non-membership of the European Union are negligible. The days of the 'Social Market Economy' are long gone and will not return.

**Civil rights: No change.** In or out, we are dependent on our rulers, on how much they think they can get away with.

**Privatisation: No change.** One aim of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is to 'open up' (privatise) health care and education. Does anyone believe that such a programme is not on the British government's agenda anyhow? In any case, state bureaucrat or company director, a boss is still a boss.

**Democracy: No change.** The undemocratic nature of the European Union is matched by the undemocratic nature of the British state. In or out, we, the working class, have little or no say in the decision-making process. In the most crucial decisions, the endless blood-soaked 'interventions', even our 'democratic' representatives in parliament have little or no say.

**Migration: No change.** The European Union is responsible for the Mediterranean massacres, a direct result of the Fortress Europe policy. Would these deaths continue if the UK was not part of the EU? Of course. Would the Calais concentration camps still be there? Of course. And perhaps greatly swollen with Poles and Eastern Europeans too (we can only hope, think the UKIPers).

### We say

A plague on both your houses!

Membership of the European Union is a concern for the capitalist class, not the working class. Because the master class is divided on this and cannot decide amongst themselves, they have passed the buck to 'the people' in the form of a referendum. Its timing is a cynical ploy by the Cameronian old boys' club to head rival UKIP off at the pass. The referendum is a non-choice between two all but identical forms of capitalist oppression.

The outcome of the referendum can't matter that much to the capitalist class - otherwise we would not have been asked. Have we been generously granted a referendum about the constant rounds of military intervention that have caused the deaths of millions? Or on global warming, a possible result of which might be the destruction of the entire planet? Or on nuclear weapons, the most colossal and dangerous waste of resources? Or on austerity, whose grinding misery has resulted in scores of suicides and deaths through stress?

Voting either IN or OUT is an act of class collaboration, to stand alongside either slimy representatives of finance capital like Cameron and Osborne or loathsome opportunists like Farage and Johnson. Your choice: Big Business or Little England. Those who swallow this are deluding themselves.

The working class interest lies in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. This referendum is not worth the shedding of a single drop of working class ink.

Vote neither IN nor OUT. Either is a vote for capitalism. Instead, use the opportunity to positively express your desire for socialism. A ballot paper 'spoilt' for socialism is a happy ballot paper.

**KAZ**

# The problem is not the EU ... it's capitalism

On 23 June you will be asked to make a decision on behalf of the minority who own and control the means of production in Britain: should they stay or should they leave the EU? Perhaps you ought to feel flattered that, for once, they have entrusted you with making a decision of vital importance to them. But our answer, as socialists, is 'we are not interested. Settle the matter yourselves'.

This is because the problems we and you face as wage and salary workers or their dependents are caused by the capitalist system of ownership by the few and production for profit. This system, which requires that making profits comes before meeting needs, will continue whether Britain is in or out of the EU. Whichever it is to be, the problems will continue. They will continue for as long as capitalism does. The only way out is if you, together with wage and salary workers in the rest of the world, organise democratically to replace global capitalism by a worldwide classless socialist society of common ownership and democratic control, with production to satisfy people's needs not for profit, and distribution on the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs" not by the amount of money you have – or don't have.

## The devil you know

Apart from a few idealists who want to see a Federal European State, the main group in favour of staying is Big Business. With good reason, from their point of view. The EU gives them tariff-free access to a vast single market with common standards. And the EU, negotiating as a single body with non-member States over trade and other economic matters and so with more bargaining power, gets them a better deal than if Britain had to do this on its own.

Other supporters are the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists who want to protect the EU subsidies their parts of Britain get. More principled is the position of the Green Party which wants to defend the free movement of workers throughout the EU – out of as well as into Britain.

Cameron claims to have negotiated some fundamental reform of the EU. Actually, he has done no more than freeze the position of Britain as a non-member of the Eurozone. He hasn't undone anything. He hasn't even stopped immigration which some mistakenly see as a problem, only held out a hope that it will be less attractive in a few years. No wonder the Eurosceptics are sceptical.

Basically, the Stay campaign are campaigning for the status quo. As is the Labour Party. In other words, capitalism as we know it, with all the problems it causes, and so not worth supporting even if it is the devil we know.

## The devil you don't

But what about the devil we don't know? Its supporters are an unsavoury lot. UKippers, Tory backwoodsmen and other xenophobes plus a few ambitious politicians calculating

that leaving will provide them with a better chance to climb further up the greasy pole. They have some limited business support, mainly small businesses producing for the home market rather than for export and some hedge funds that don't want to be regulated.

The leave camp are the ones proposing a change, which they claim will be for the better. But their case is a mixture of wishful thinking and the usual empty promises of politicians. It doesn't even make sense from a capitalist point of view. Certainly, as they claim, outside the EU British capitalism could still have access to the single EU market, but would no longer have a say in fixing its rules and regulations. A non-EU Britain could still, as they also claim, negotiate trade deals with other countries and trading blocs, but on its own would be in a weaker bargaining position. No wonder Big Business and its supporters regard them as flat-earthers.

## The sovereign has no clothes

One more respectable argument for leaving than 'Keep Immigrants Out' or 'Send Them Back' is that leaving would give back to parliament the 'sovereign power' to decide what laws should apply in Britain. Capitalism, however, is a single world economic system, which makes 'independence' and 'sovereignty' purely formal when it comes to economic matters. Governments, whatever formal powers they may have, cannot control the way the profit system works. In fact it's the other way round. Capitalism is sovereign and governments have to apply its basic economic law that priority must be given to profit-making as this was what drives the system.

A State can choose that its government and parliament take the decisions required to comply with capitalism's basic economic law (as the leavers want) or it can delegate some of these decisions to some inter-governmental body (as at present and as the stayers support), but in the end it doesn't matter who makes the decision. Nor where, whether London or Brussels. The decision is made.

## How to vote, then?

You don't need to accept the sham choice on offer in this referendum between the devil you know and the devil you don't. Leave that choice to those who support capitalism in one form or another. As we consider the right to vote as a gain and a possible tool to end capitalism we will be going to the polling station, to cast a write-in vote for socialism by writing "WORLD SOCIALISM" across our ballot paper. If you agree with us, we urge you to do the same.

## Executive Committee

The Socialist Party of Great Britain  
April 2016



# Living on Tick

*From Shakespeare's Shylock to Dickens' Scrooge, moneylenders have generally had a bad literary press, probably revealing people's instinctive reaction to them, but their place in society remains central. We examine the role of debt in working-class life.*

Robert Roberts' *The Classic Slum* describes life in Salford in the first part of last century. The pawnshop was an essential part of the local community; many people were dependent on the short-term loans offered, with women often pawning the family's 'best' clothes on Monday until the following Saturday. There was a social hierarchy among the working class, with skilled workers at the top, and various 'disreputable' individuals at the bottom; and position 'was judged not only by what one possessed but also by what one pawned'. True destitution meant pawning not just clothes but also pots and rugs, and finally not being able to redeem what had been left with the broker. The interest charged was usually a penny in the shilling per week; sky-high, but less than the moneylender, who charged threepence in the shilling per week.

Pawnbroking is not now the widespread industry it was in the days Roberts was writing about, but it began to grow again from the 1980s. There are now over two million loans a year, and the market as a whole is worth £850m, though the average loan is less than £200 and is for three or four months. The National Pawnbrokers Association states that 88 percent of loans are redeemed, but that still leaves around 250,000 which are not (though this does not mean that the value of the goods has been completely lost). The NPA describes pawnbroking as 'a serious alternative to using the services provided by the High Street bank' and 'a modern, friendly and convenient way of getting cash quickly'. They claim it is cheaper than a bank loan or using a payday lender.

In July 1954 war-time food rationing came to an end, as did restrictions on hire-purchase ('never-never') agreements for consumer durables such as radios, fridges and vacuum cleaners. This meant buying what were then relative 'luxuries', in contrast to buying essentials such as furniture this way back in the 30s. Nowadays, hire purchase is often used in buying cars, including companies buying a fleet of cars. For personal consumers, it avoids the need to pay a big sum up-front, but it can lead to problems: if you return an item after paying less than half its cost, you have to pay enough on top of what you've already paid to make up that half cost (so you might get just three months' use of something but have to pay a year's worth of instalments).

The extreme case of hire-purchase is that of the weekly payment stores, which make big profits, primarily from the massive interest rates they charge on their loans and the service cover they also sell. Back in 2012 the *Guardian* gave an example of an oven that could be bought from one such company for £562 (or £389 elsewhere) but would cost a

whopping £1433 if bought on weekly instalments from that same company with service cover over three years. Sales pressure plus an inability to pay by other means can easily result in people taking on such commitments without quite realising what they are letting themselves in for.

If people are having trouble repaying any kind of debt, they may well have recourse to one of the payday loan companies that now exist on almost every high street. But these again are incredibly expensive, with annual interest rates sometimes topping several hundred percent. The debt charity Step Change gives an example of someone borrowing just £200 for twenty days at the maximum allowable rate of 0.8 percent a day. If you repaid the loan on time, you would pay back £232, which is already quite a stiff rate of interest. But if you are late, then



Balls to poverty...

the interest mounts up, a late fee is added and you have to pay interest on the late fee. If you are ninety days late repaying, you would repay £400 (double the original loan, and the legal maximum that can be charged).

As this suggests, being poor is in itself expensive. Using prepayment meters for energy is more expensive than a standard tariff; and borrowing money means a higher rate of interest if you do not have a good credit record. No wonder debt counselling has become a minor industry in its own right. Some writers have even referred to there being a 'poverty industry'.

Mortgages are of course the biggest source of debt, while students typically have over £40,000 in debt when they graduate. But plenty of people borrow – especially from payday loan companies and even doorstep lenders – to pay for everyday expenses such as food and energy as they struggle to make it to the next payday. They also borrow to pay for Christmas and so avoid disappointing their kids. And they borrow to pay off existing debts, which can swiftly lead to things spiralling out of control. Losing your job, falling ill, the break-up of a relationship: all these can tip people over the edge into chronic indebtedness.

The Money Charity provides a great many statistics on the extent of debt. For instance, in February this year, the average debt per household, including mortgages, was over £54,000. Outstanding consumer credit lending was £180bn, including £63bn on credit cards. Every day over two hundred people are declared insolvent or bankrupt, and twenty-five properties are repossessed. Other sources have noted the big increase

in household debt over the last year or so, with the average increasing by over a third to £13,500 (mortgages aside). Shelter reported that one in ten parents thought that they might be unable to pay their rent or mortgage bills in January this year. Moreover, in March the increase in borrowing was the biggest since March 2005, before the recession began, leading debt charities to become increasingly worried.

The definition of 'problem debt' is when a family pays more than 25 percent of their gross monthly pay on servicing unsecured debts, and this applied to 3.2 million families by 2014 (up from 2.5 million in 2012). The pressure of debt can be overwhelming. In the words of one man who eventually did cope with his problems: 'I felt like I was drowning, felt trapped. There was no light coming from anywhere, it was horrendous. And at one point I did go really dark and I did want to end it all' (*BBC Online*, 20 January). Some people do in fact commit suicide because of their debt problems. In November 2013, for instance, a 60-year-old man from Southampton killed himself after taking on £20,000 in debts from twelve payday loan firms: his jobseeker's allowance had been stopped on the grounds that he was fit to work, even though he had an illness that prevented him from swallowing (*Daily Mirror*, 22 July 2014).

Pawnbroking dates back at least to Ancient Greece, but it takes capitalism, with the cash nexus touching almost all aspects of life, with the never-ending influence of advertising, and with the insecurity felt by many workers, to make so many people subject to the worry and pressure of debt.

**PAUL BENNETT**



## Summer School

22nd - 24th July 2016

Fircroft College, Birmingham

Money flows through every aspect of society, and therefore affects every aspect of our lives. What possessions we have, the efficiency of the services we use, and how we are supposed to value ourselves are all shaped by the money system.

We're encouraged to think of the economy in much the same way as we think about the weather – something changeable, but always there. When the climate is 'good', life feels brighter. When the climate is 'bad', we huddle down until we can ride out the storm. Although we'll always have the weather, the economy doesn't have to be permanent.

Our weekend of talks and discussion looks at the role of money in our society. In what ways does money affect how we think

and behave? How does the economy really function? How did money come to be such a dominant force? We also look forward to a moneyless socialist society, which will be – in more than one sense of the word – free.

Talks include:

Janet Surman discusses a moneyless society: 'Profiting From A Moneyless World'

Adam Buick presents 'An Idiot's Guide To Banking: How To Avoid Being A Currency Crank'.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is £100. The concessionary rate is £50. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

To book a place, send a cheque (payable to the Socialist Party of Great Britain) to Summer School, Sutton Farm, Aldborough, Boroughbridge, York, YO51 9ER, or book online through the QR code or at <http://spgb.net/summerschool2016>. E-mail enquiries to [spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk)



# Scarcity and Infinite Wants: The Founding Myths of Economics



*A detail from the Land of Cockayne*

If you open any textbook on economics you will find the definition at the beginning as to what economics is will include the concept of 'scarcity'. On the one side, it is taught, there are scarce resources and, on the other side, unlimited wants, and that economics is the study of the choices people make (as individuals and societies) to deal with this.

However, the concept of 'scarcity' used in these definitions is an abnormal and circular one and human wants are not unlimited. The relationship between scarce resources and unlimited wants is not what economics actually studies. The definition above is an ideological construct to justify one particular way of organising the production and distribution of goods and services – the capitalist system of production for profit, involving markets, money, prices, profits, wages, interest, banks, etc. That's what economics really studies.

## What is scarcity?

When someone says that something is scarce what comes to your mind? Probably you think that there's not enough of it, that it's in short supply. That's the normal usage, but for modern academic economics it's something rather different. In his widely used textbook *Economics* Paul Samuelson writes of 'the law of scarcity'. Actually, it's not a law but a

definition. In setting it down Samuelson contrasts scarcity to a situation where 'an infinite amount of every good could be produced'. The opening chapter of another American textbook, with the same title, by Ralph T. Byrns and Gerard W. Stone is entitled 'Economics: The Study of Scarcity and Choice'. One paragraph, headed 'Scarcity', starts: 'A world in which all human wants are instantly fulfilled is hard to imagine.' Yes, it is. In fact it's preposterous.

But that's what's behind what economics means by 'scarcity' – it's the absence of an infinite amount of every resource and every good, the absence of a state of affairs in which everything would be provided free by nature, in which, as in the mediaeval legend of the Land of Cockayne, geese would fly around ready-cooked saying 'eat me!' And we're supposed to take their definition seriously.

It's the same with what economics means by what is normally regarded as the opposite of scarcity – abundance.

The normal definition of this is, to quote a few dictionaries, 'plenty', 'more than enough', and even 'ample sufficiency'. It does not mean everything being what economics calls 'free goods'. 'Free goods', in fact, is the last trace in economics of the Labour Theory of Value, which was embraced by Adam Smith and David Ricardo as well as by Karl Marx, since they are goods that are available without having to be the product of human labour. They are 'free' because no labour has to be expended to produce them.

So, economics is defining 'scarcity' in such a way that it exists by definition and irrespective of human needs; that it's part of the human condition. In a way it is, though this is a strange way of putting it. A much more straightforward way would be to say that humans have to produce by their own work what they need. But that of course leads back to the dreaded Labour Theory of Value as it would bring out that the only sort of goods that economics is interested in are those that are the products of human labour, past and present.

But this definition of scarcity is still not adequate for the ideological aim of justifying a system where people's consumption is rationed by money. The imagined killer argument here is that productive resources, however abundant (in the normal sense), will never be enough to

satisfy human needs and wants as these are 'unlimited'. So there will always be a need to ration what people can consume.

This view is stated very clearly in the Byrns and Stone textbook in its definition of economics:

*'Economics is the study of how individuals and societies allocate limited resources to try to satisfy their unlimited wants.'*

On the same page there's 'Figure 1: The Origins of Scarcity' which aims to illustrate this. On the left side there's 'Limited Resources and Time' and on the right side there's a list of 'Virtually Unlimited Human Wants'. This is introduced by



Paul Samuelson

a statement which already begs the question of the existence of a system with monetary incomes and spending: *'Scarcity occurs because our limited resources and time can only yield limited production and income, but people's needs are virtually unlimited. Output is produced by using knowledge (technology) to apply energy to a blend of resources.*

*Production, in turn, generates the income people spend on the limited goods and services available.'*

### What are human needs?

Philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, nutritionists and others have argued over the definition of both 'needs' and 'wants' but clearly there is, to coin a phrase, a 'hierarchy of needs' based on, first of all, physiological/biological needs, primarily food. But 'Man does not live by bread alone' as humans are social animals and have other needs beyond this level, basically to be members of a community and to have social recognition and esteem within it. This is not purely social but has a material aspect to it as what a person consumes affects how they are socially regarded, how they regard themselves, and what their aspirations are. In other words, 'wants' are socially-determined, not just a matter of individual whim. They are determined by society, not by biology in the way that basic human needs are (though even how these too are met is socially-determined).

So we've got: (1) Basic, physiological needs; (2) Non-material, social/psychological needs; and (3) Material needs and wants arising out of both of these. These categories can be applied to the textbook's list of 'Virtually Unlimited Human Wants'.

The list contains what can be regarded as *basic needs*: food, clothing, housing, etc.

It also contains some goods to meet people's survival needs over and above the minimum to stay alive, e. g: transportation, comfort, good health but also useful objects such as microwaves, telephones, washing machines, computers, CDs, CD players, VCRs. But there is no problem in producing enough of these for everyone. In fact most people have already got them now. (It's not certain, though, that people still want CD players and video recorders but the book came out in 1992 – another example of how wants are socially determined and depend on what's available).

And then there's *non-material, social needs*: recognition, sense of personal worth, peace of mind, success in life.

And finally, and this is where it becomes revealing, the *material goods to satisfy these non-material needs*: jewellery, three-car garage, golf lessons, plastic surgery, swimming pool, Hawaiian vacations, fancy automobiles, ski boats, yachts, designer wardrobes, country estate.

Non-material needs (such as the listed recognition, sense of personal worth, and success in life) can be met in a number of ways depending on what kind of society people have been brought up in and live in. The textbook's list of ways to meet them today clearly reflects a society divided into rich and non-rich where to be rich is a measure of success in life and a way of gaining recognition.

The dogma of unlimited human wants which economics preaches assumes such a society and that wants are infinite because the non-rich aspire to be rich and the rich want to be richer. This latter itself is an internalisation by the rich of the fact that capitalism is a system of endless capital accumulation.

The 'wants' that capitalist society generates may well be 'virtually unlimited' but capitalism is not the only way of producing and distributing wealth nor of satisfying people's need for recognition, sense of personal worth, and success in life. These needs can be met in other ways in a different society and have been in past and would be in a socialist society of social equals producing to satisfy people's needs rather than for sale with a view to profits and their accumulation as capital.

**ADAM BUICK**

## Party News

The Socialist Party stood 3 candidates in the Greater London Assembly and 1 candidate in the Welsh Assembly elections on 5 May. Here are the results:

**Lambeth and Southwark:** Lab 96946 (51.63%), Con 34703 (18.48), Green 25793 (13.74), LibDem 21489 (11.4), UKIP 6591 (3.51), Kevin Parkin (Soc) 1333 (0.71), All Peoples Party 906 (0.48).

**London North East:** 134307 (58.7%), Con 32565 (14.23), Green 29401 (12.85), LibDem) 14312 (6.26), UKIP 11315 (4.95), Respect 5068 (2.22), Bill Martin (Soc) 1293 (0.57), Communist League 536 (0.23).

**London South West:** Con 84381 (39.47%), Lab 62937 (29.4), LibDem) 30654 (14.34), Green 19745 (9.24), UKIP 14983 (7.01), Adam Buick (Soc) 1065 (0.50).

**Swansea West:** Lab 9014 (40.6%) Con 3934 (17.7%), Plaid Cymru 3325 (14.5), UKIP 3058 (13.8), LibDem (2012) 9.1), Green 883 (4.0), Brian Johnson (Soc) 76 (0.3)



# Opposites and the man at the bar

**W**hilst enjoying a beverage at my local pub an acquaintance came up to the bar where I was seated and ordered a beer. He glanced at me and said: 'You know there are two kinds of people in the world; those who sit at the bar and those who stand'. I can't remember the rest of what he said because my thoughts had turned to the question: why are dualities so attractive to us in our understanding of the world?

Once you attempt to name the most commonly used examples of this rhetorical device it quickly becomes apparent that there are hundreds and possibly thousands of them. To name but a few: Good & Evil, Day & Night, Rich & Poor, Old & New, Mind & Body, Masculine & Feminine, Up & Down, Life & Death, Something & Nothing etc., etc. I'm not sure if this dualistic perspective is ubiquitous to humanity and its languages or if it is mainly a European linguistic phenomena but its investigation in terms of the philosophical/political implications within it are surely worth investigating. Is a dualistic analysis just an example of lazy intellectual stereotyping or is it of value within a polemical discourse?

There is, as I've said, an inexhaustible reservoir of examples of this kind of description but perhaps if we pick just four of those most often found within political debate then we can deconstruct them to assess their efficacy or otherwise: Love & Hate, Left & Right, Progressive & Reactionary and Chaos & Structure.

## Love and Hate

Love & Hate can be important in all areas of life including politics since our culture emphasises the emotions as essential to an authentic relationship with others and the world (if you don't feel it, it isn't real). As with most dualities there is an implicit value-judgement that separates the two components. In this example love is invariably thought to be superior to hate. This moral asymmetry can be shown as rather superficial since the hatred of cruelty and injustice can be seen as positive emotions just as the love of money and power can be seen negatively.

By referring to yet another duality, that of positive and negative, we seem in danger of being able to describe one duality only with reference to another. If this is indeed the case then we would end up with a series of Russian dolls and be unable to resolve the meaning and so the efficacy of the categories would remain in doubt. Let's try again with the second example of Left & Right.

## Left and Right

When applied to politics it seems to have its origin during the French Revolution when the radicals sat to the left of the chairman of the Assembly and the more conservative elements sat to the right. This political designation has become ubiquitous ever since, representing a spectrum that all ideologies are squeezed into. The ends of this spectrum are conceived of as extremes (Fascism & Communism)

and those in the 'centre' are regarded as 'moderates'. But any serious analysis of the 20th century reveals that Russian 'communism' and German Fascism were equally as authoritarian and murderous and that there was certainly no profound ideological distinction. That Fascism might represent a degenerate stage of capitalism whereas Russian 'communism' represented capitalism in its formative Russian context suggests an analysis that relies on an understanding of history rather than the ideological dualism of Left & Right. Ideologies inevitably seek to rationalise events and cannot be used to explain or predict them. Again we have morphed into the territory of another dualism: Progressive & Reactionary, which is our next category.

## Progressive and Reactionary

This example also implies a moral distinction but only courtesy of a belief in the progressive nature of human development. Without that we are left with a 'human nature' that is fixed and therefore excludes the possibility of redemption – condemning us to make the same mistakes repeatedly and forever. But this description, at least, does not possess the absolutes that we associate with Good & Evil, Love & Hate, or even Left & Right. The relationship between the two elements of progressive & reactionary are obviously historically closely associated.

A belief in human progress implies that we build on what we already have or had. They are mutually interdependent which, in retrospect we can see, all dualities are. Without their opposite they become meaningless. It is within this dynamic relationship that we find any analysis at its most productive. We have deconstructed the moral absolutes into opposing abstracts that create new ideas which take their place within a dialectical polemic. Without a belief in progression this would become merely moral relativism but given the guiding principles of social justice and political equality it becomes its antithesis.

## Chaos and Structure

Our last example is surely one of the most profound. The need for structure and the fear of chaos is connected with our most primal need – survival. Living within the cultural and technological environment we have created means the need for social cohesion is vital (even though this is enforced through coercion and fear within capitalism). Any serious threat to this causes anxiety and it is this fear that is played upon by reactionary ideologies.

The portrayal of any new conception of social organisation as leading to chaos is a very powerful emotional component of conservative propaganda. That capitalism was born in the bloody chaos of the 'bourgeois revolutions' is conveniently forgotten. That social revolution does represent a period of uncertainty is undeniable but then so is the continuous instability of today's global financial system and the crises and wars it produces – a kind of institutionalised chaos where only the parasitic minority are protected from its effects.

Dualities in themselves remain a simplistic ideological device that restricts thought. It is only when their components are conceived of as mutually dependent within a continuing process of interpretation that they become transparent and useful. The difference between a man who sits at the bar and a man who stands is much less important than the quality of beverage that he consumes and his subsequent dualistic relationship with himself (mind & body) and, of course, with gravity.

WEZ

## OBITUARIES

### Bill Critchfield

Bill Critchfield died on 1 April. He was 91 years old. The official cause of death was pneumonia but this was a development of his remorseless decline, over some ten years, through Alzheimer's disease. He came from an extended family of which there were seven members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

During the war he volunteered to join the Air Force and he was sent to Canada to train as a Bomb Aimer. After returning to England he flew on a number of bombing raids over Germany. In 1945, with the end of the war in Europe he was posted to India where he completed the term of his time in the Air Force.

When he returned home it was to find his two brothers were members of the Socialist Party and after a lengthy period of disagreement with them he was convinced that he should do the same. He joined the Ealing Branch, where he took on several administrative jobs and regularly spoke to introduce the Party at street corner meetings, which were then a regular feature of our propaganda. When, following the outbreak of the Korean War the Labour Government

re-introduced military conscription Bill informed the Air Ministry that as a socialist he would refuse to be re-called. Towards the end of his life, with the cruel decline of his senses, he took comfort from the anti-war poems of the likes of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

RC

### Bernie Flitter

We are saddened to have to report the death in April at the age of 90 of another longstanding comrade, Bernie Flitter. He joined the then Bloomsbury branch in 1943 after listening to our speakers in Hyde Park. He later transferred to Fulham branch where he was an active member and outdoor speaker in the 1940s and 50s. He earned his living as an accountant. Latterly he was a member of Central branch. Our condolences go to this wife, Marie, also a member, and family.



#### Mises is irrelevant

The *Weekly Worker* (28 April) carried an interesting article by the Trotskyoid Hillel Ticktin which, unusually for someone from his political background, gave a good description of socialism which (also unusually) he called socialism:

'A distinguishing mark of socialism is that distribution would operate according to need, rather than input ... people will be able to walk into a distribution point and pick up what they need.'

'In a socialist society you would expect workers to work in the way that they judge is correct. Since a worker's incentive under socialism is not money, they work as best they can in order that they not only fulfil what they are doing for the collectivity, but for themselves. You would expect that they would work as well as they can, without any need for discipline from outside.'

Curiously though, at one point he says 'von Mises was right'. Mises, the arch-advocate of the dystopia of a free market capitalism, argued that in a socialist society, with common ownership and no free market in means of production, rational economic calculation would be impossible and that such a society would not last for long but would eventually break down in economic chaos. This was a circular

argument in that he defined rational economic calculation as calculation based on prices set by the free play of market forces.

Ticktin was accepting Mises's argument that in a situation where productive capacity is not enough to satisfy people's needs, calculation in some general unit of account such as money or labour-time would be necessary. He speculates that Marx's 'period of the revolutionary transformation' of capitalist into communist society during which he says this would have to be the case could last 'let us say anything between 10 and 50 years.'

Ten years is one thing but fifty is another. Maybe in Marx's day, in 1875, any such period might have been nearer to the fifty end. Today, however, in view of the tremendous development of the forces of production since then, even ten years seems on the long side for a period in which to re-orient production so as meet people's needs, especially as, unlike Mises's followers, Ticktin rejects that humans needs are infinite:

'The bourgeois concept of the human being having infinite needs is ridiculous, but it is the basis of bourgeois economics. ... In fact there is a limited amount that needs to be produced for a given society and consequently under socialism we will be able to identify the limited areas in which increased production is needed.'

Also, Ticktin accepts that there is an enormous amount of wasted production under capitalism whereas in socialism:

'Obviously there will be no such thing as finance, and whole sections of economic activity will no longer exist because they are completely wasteful and unnecessary. There will be no arms production, no advertising and, of course, no City of London – you can go through the different wasteful forms that will cease to exist. It is quite clear that the standard of living could very quickly be raised if such waste is removed.'

So, once this waste is 'very quickly' removed, we would already have a situation of relative abundance and so should be able to move equally quickly to socialism and free access to available goods and services.

So, why would we need to go to the trouble – and waste – of setting up a vast bureaucracy to measure the labour-time content of everything with a view to reducing it to a minimum and an individual's input to production with a view to calculating their entitlement to goods and services, when the supposed need for this is not going to last for long? Even Mises conceded that socialism could continue for a while without having recourse to his 'rational economic calculation'.







# Monarchy Malarkey

PRINCE CHARLES finds out that he has a grown-up mixed-race son from a forgotten fling pre-Diana. Newly-pregnant Camilla fears that this will disrupt her plans for the Parker-Bowles dynasty. So she buys her new step-son a motorbike with faulty brakes, and after he dies in an accident her unborn child is back closer to being the heir to the throne. This is just one of the daft plot threads crammed into *The Windsors*, Channel 4's soapy sitcom featuring caricatures of the royal family, or nearly all of them.

Prince William is played with a permanently furrowed brow and steely determination to be a helicopter pilot. His father doesn't approve, and thinks that William only needed to be in the RAF so he could wear the uniform at his wedding. Kate has a wide-eyed enthusiasm about finding her place in the monarchy, even if her 'Gypsy heritage' risks being an embarrassment. Pippa Middleton is portrayed as a sneering, devious gold-digger 'with a fantastic arse'. Envious of Kate's promotion to royalty, she tries to inveigle herself into the clan by seducing Harry. He's depicted as being a bit thick, with the occasional hint that he's not Prince Charles' son. Harry Enfield plays Charles, the only actor doing anything close to an impersonation. He fills his time overseeing an organic biscuit company and writing to the government about green issues like woodlice habitats. Camilla is impatient to be Queen and worried that Wills and Kate's popularity will mean the line of succession to the throne will skip a generation. She works to sabotage their reputation among 'the Great British scum' by engineering Kate insulting a group of amputees by dressing as a peg-leg pirate.

Washed-up Fergie gets disappointed when she isn't recognised and annoyed about having her nickname usurped by Alex

Ferguson and the singer in the Black Eyed Peas. Beatrice and Eugenie are faced with having to support themselves, so they set up businesses as 'online make-up tip girl sensations' and then a dating app for aristocrats. They fix-up a date between Fergie and a caddish Prince Andrew hoping 'we can be a happy family again, just like we were in January and February 1994'. Prince Edward's TV production company folded long ago, so he tries to scrape some money together by working as an incompetent removals service and babysitter for Wills and Kate.

So far, Prince Philip only features in the swears, racist letters he sends to his grandsons, reminding them that he's ordered MI6 to assassinate Fergie if she goes within five miles of Buckingham Palace. The Queen has been conspicuous by her absence in the show, and doesn't even get mentioned. Depicting her has been a risk the programme-makers haven't wanted to take, perhaps mindful of the controversy when *Spitting Image* introduced a puppet of the Queen Mother. In the mid-'80s, many thought that mocking 'the nation's favourite granny' was a step too far, and the producers of *The Windsors* haven't wanted to take the equivalent step today. Despite the irreverence, the show doesn't really want to risk offence or encourage republican feeling. The royals' naivety about the world everyone else lives in is shown in an endearing way. Those who've failed to stay in the inner circle (Edward, Fergie, Beatrice, Eugenie) are likeable hard-up has-beens. Apart from Kate, those not in the royal bloodline (Pippa and Camilla) are portrayed as conniving haridans. The world outside the Windsors' window is largely populated by stereotypes; Northerners wear cloth caps, put ferrets down their trousers and eat chip butties, while Gypsies tarmac drives, grow lucky heather and collect scrap metal. The programme tries to get away with this by pitching all the performances as too knowingly over-the-top to take seriously. The plotlines are also too overblown for the show to have much satirical bite.

*The Windsors* is the latest in the line of succession of royal caricatures on the telly. Its closest descendent is *The Royals* (recently shown on E!), a largely poorly-received American melodrama about a made-up royal family's shenanigans. *Spitting Image* (1984 – 1996) remains the benchmark, and spawned similar successors like *2DTV* (2001 – 2004), *Animated Headcases* (2008) and *Newzoids* (2015). Whereas these shows turned the royals into cartoon characters, *Doubletake*, a 2003 BBC2 series took a different approach. This featured celebrity lookalikes in personal or embarrassing situations, as if captured on CCTV or shaky hidden cameras. Images like doppelgangers of the Queen sitting on the toilet and Camilla in her underwear were intended to demythologise celebs, not make them even larger than life. In contrast, *The Windsors* is overdone and doesn't have anything original to say, a bit like its subject matter.

**MIKE FOSTER**



## Why did Syriza fail?

*Syriza. Inside the Labyrinth.* By Kevin Ovenden. Pluto Press. 2015.



This is the first book issued by the new Left Book Club. An attempt at reviving the famous left-wing book series of the 1930s and 1940s, the new Left Book Club is part of the efforts of different shades

of left-wing politicians to rejuvenate the Labour Party in the light of the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. In its promotional literature, it sees itself as supporting the efforts of the Momentum campaign group in trying to produce a substantial and lasting leftwards shift in the Labour Party and British politics more widely.

Kevin Ovenden's book on the rise of Syriza in Greece is a sympathetic account of the rapid rise of that political party's rise from left-wing fringe group to a party of government. It is a readable enough account but suffused throughout by the optimism that behind Syriza's rise and resistance to government cuts and privatisations lay revolutionary possibilities. Take, for example, the strikes and occupations of the state broadcaster ERT whose workers had been made redundant en masse and whose occupation of their workplace and continued broadcasting on a voluntary basis in new collaborative ways that replaced prevailing hierarchical management control. Ovenden claims that these were 'a lived experiment of how democratic participation and control might be extended deeper into the society – if the central structures of economic and state power were brought under control' (p.62-3).

Now, we can agree that workers taking over the workplace and running it on a wageless, democratic basis does provide a basis for socialist optimism but not in the way that Ovenden does. Despite Ovenden's claims that the radicalism that resulted in the election of Syriza was anti-capitalist his use of the phrase 'brought under control' hints at the role of state ownership envisaged in this process by many on the radical left. The outcome for the ERT workers was to be re-employed by the state following the election of the Syriza government in 2015. Whatever

revolutionary potential may be latent in the action of ERT workers they were not opened up by its end in state ownership. Whatever hope such actions inspire for socialists, without the intention to infuse them with a consciousness of the limitations of capitalism in serving human development in a fuller way then it can only be a transitory protest. If political action is to be meaningfully anti-capitalist it must not only have a clear idea of what capitalism is but of what it is not, a clear idea of what it is to be replaced with. Not only was action such as that of the ERT workers a minority experience in the struggles against government cuts and attacks on pay and conditions of employment but even within the radicalised minority there was and is no clear idea of how Syriza's putative anti-capitalism was anything different from what had been tried before by left-wing governments of various hues. Essentially what was put forward was a change of management with radical intentions but still having to create favourable conditions for Greek capitalism or risk a worsening of state finances that would result in even greater cuts in expenditure than were already occurring.

The needs of capital to self-expand, that is, for economies to grow, is of its nature. Capitalists or politicians can no more get around this than Canute could hold back the tide. This was a central theme of Karl Marx who repeatedly wrote of capitalists as the personification of economic categories. Capitalists were (and remain) 'embodiments of particular class relations and class-interests... the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remain' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, Preface to German 1867 edition). It is not a matter of ethics, then, of capitalists and their crony politicians being bad men and women. It is that for capital to self-expand, for national economies to grow, certain requirements need to be met. As Marx colourfully put it, capital 'lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (*Capital*, Vol.1, p. 342). Politicians elected to run capitalism such as Alexis Tsipras, however sincere, can only tweak the amount of blood the vampire sucks but suck blood he must. Working class protest can only become revolutionary when it reflects on the nature of capitalism and its essentially exploitative basis, the inability of the economic basis of capitalism to allow workers full and free access to the results of its collective labour

and demands its emancipation from wage slavery. The vampire is such by nature and must be slain – it cannot be befriended or counselled to suck blood benevolently.

Ovenden's account stops as the story of Syriza starts to unravel with the acceptance of harsher terms on the extension of Greek government debt rather than the promises of easier terms or an alternative strategy (such as Greek withdrawal from the EU and the euro). Ovenden quotes from the left of Syriza on the unnecessary and defenceless abandonment of any alternative strategy, such as Younis Varoufakis and Costas Lapavistas. The latter (a professor of economics in London and former Syriza MP) has commented that 'the Syriza party is faithfully implementing the austerity policies that it once derided' (Guardian 25th January 2016) and that 'Syriza is the first example of a government of the left that has not simply failed to deliver on its promises but also adopted the programme of the opposition, wholesale'. It is far from the first. The British Labour government in the late 1970s and the French 'Socialist' government in early 1980s spring quickly to mind but there are many other recent examples. Lapavistas argued that 'the Syriza leadership was convinced that if it rejected a new bailout, European lenders would buckle in the face of generalised financial and political unrest. The risks to the Eurozone were, they presumed, greater than the risks to Greece. If Syriza negotiated hard, it would be offered an "honourable compromise" relaxing austerity and lightening the national debt.' The Syriza leadership were over optimistic to the point of delusion and unprepared to actually follow up with an alternative economic policy, which would have involved the exit of capital from the Greek economy. Therefore, the 'EU calmly turned off the liquidity tap at the European Central Bank, and refused to give a penny of additional financial support until Greece complied.' Lapavistas (and Ovenden) conclude that the lesson for working class politics is to be prepared to break away from the EU and its monetary policy in order to break with neoliberal austerity politics as if life in capitalism before neoliberalism was a bed of roses. Lapavistas is concerned that the failure of Syriza to deliver radical change encourages the perception that 'austerity is the only way and nothing can ever change'. However, it is not politicians that shape capitalism

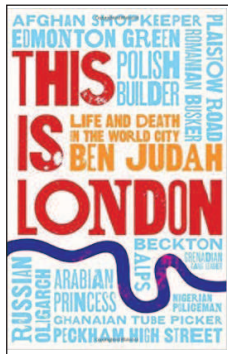


but capitalism that shapes them. The vampire always needs to feed.

COLIN SKELLY

## This is life?

*This Is London: Life and Death in the World City.* Ben Judah. Picador. 2016.



This is a sad, insightful and ultimately haunting insider account of life in London by a writer who can really write. It is a picture of what life is truly like for hundreds of thousands

of London's current inhabitants by someone determined to identify their struggles and recount their lives – people who most of us know are there, but perhaps never quite get to know. The Romanian beggars working for gangs to pay off their debts in the subways under Hyde Park Corner, the Mayfair Arab princess out of her mind on skunk most days because her every move is controlled by her father (even remotely via his security team), the itinerant Polish builders of Beckton creating the 'dig down' basement flats for the rich in Knightsbridge, the East European and Latin American street walkers of Ilford Lane, ever fearful of the next attack from a punter.

Judah's opening lines tell us his motivation: 'I have to see everything for myself. I don't trust statistics. I don't trust columnists. I don't trust self-appointed spokesmen. I have to make up my own mind. This is why I am shivering again, in Victoria Coach station, at 6 am.'

By spending months trying to uncover the 'other side' of London to the one the tourists see, he has managed to create a fascinating and compelling book based on his experiences of the street. The facts are clear – as few as 45 percent of Londoners now are 'white British' and over a third have been born abroad. But this is not a UKIP manifesto in disguise, it is book that focuses on the lives of real people who are now more genuinely representative of those scraping a living in 'the world city' than the occupants of the glossy colour supplements and property magazines. These are the 95 percent of cleaners working for Transport for London who are immigrants, doing the job that others won't do or can't. The

occupants of Zones 3 and 4 who have been pushed by the global elite out of central London – the traditional first home to UK immigrants – into what were once mainly white working class suburbs full of semis and terraces. This is where multi-occupancy now reigns courtesy of buy-to-let landlords, and life is precarious and often dangerous – the Edmontons and Leytons of this world, the Harlesdens and Neasdens. This is the world of pounds shops, 'cash converters', mobile phone un-locking, and pubs now converted into African churches, of betting shops, and fried chicken and kebabs.

You will have sensed this not an uplifting read. Some of the laziest racism, for instance, is to be found among poor, black evangelical Christians in Peckham, ever suspicious of the Asian shopkeepers they think fleece them at every turn. And when you have nothing, materialism and competition can be brutish enough and a descent to drink, drugs and desperate gambling close around the corner.

It is partly because of situations like this that socialists are socialists – not because of some abstract moral pity for those less fortunate, but because the society we live in is based on the need to keep us insecure and fearful, with a descent into the 'underclass' or 'precariat' all too vivid a misfortune for those who struggle every day in the grandly-named 'market economy'.

DAP

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## Imitation of Life: Melodrama and Race in the 21st Century.

Home arts centre, Manchester.

*Imitation of Life* was a 1959 film, directed by Douglas Sirk, that dealt with issues of 'race' and gender in the US. One of its characters was a black woman whose daughter had a light-enough skin to pass as white, and the film looked at how successful she was in making her way in the world. The film was controversial at the time, and remains so, in terms of the extent to which it questioned or reinforced stereotypes about black people.



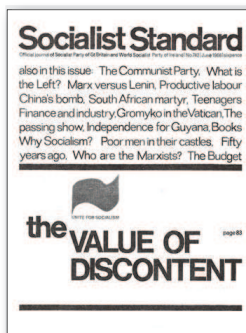
Now an exhibition of the same title is on at the Home arts centre in Manchester. Its sub-title is *Melodrama and Race in the 21st Century*, with 'melodrama' meaning something which is exaggerated and appeals to the emotions. Works by twelve artists are displayed.

Photos by Sophia Al-Maria deal with facial whitening creams, which are produced to be sold in South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Many people in India are obsessed with having lighter-coloured skin. The packaging of the products is distorted in these shots, presumably echoing the faces to which these creams are applied.

Martine Syms looks at American situation comedies. *The Cosby Show*, which ran from 1984 to 1992, was attractive to a black audience as it showed black people as just like anyone else, but it erased ideas of black struggle.

Jayson Musson provides a video, using his alter ego Hennessy Youngman, on 'How to be a

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## 50 Years Ago

### China's bomb

GOOD NEWS for all lovers of militarism and destruction was that China detonated her third nuclear bomb — it may even have been a hydrogen one.

Good news, also, for all lovers

of the distortion of words was that this latest test was described by Peking as 'a great victory for the party's general line of Socialist construction.'

Good news for all connoisseurs of hypocrisy was that the State Department condemned the test because of its effect on the atmosphere — as if the United States had never exploded nuclear weapons in the air, and as if they are not continuing to test the things underground.

The Chinese bomb is yet another lap in the desperate nuclear arms race which has been in progress since Hiroshima. As each new country joins the race it justifies its presence with lies about its concern for peace and world security.

And the countries who are already in the race always 'deplore' and 'condemn' and murmur about having a disarmament conference somewhere, sometime — because they are concerned about any threat to their dominant standing in the world.

China is a rising capitalist power, and she has paid for her entry in the race in the coin which all the others have used and which is the only one universally recognised — force.

If it were not so terrifying it would be laughable that this onward march to destruction should be called Socialism. We live now in a society of madness, in which the very words we use often lose all sense and meaning.

Happily, there is one band who work determinedly to keep the word Socialism sane and clean, and who will not have it confused with the terrorism and hypocrisy of capitalism.



(From News in Review, *Socialist Standard*, June 1966)

## ACTION REPLAY

### Cinderella Men win Premier League

AGAINST ALL the odds and prognostications of sports journalists and pundits, Leicester City, the team that narrowly missed relegation last season, silenced the doomsayers and doubters by winning the English Premier League.

Leicester could be described as a team of journeymen who have been rejected by former clubs or have joined from lower leagues. But led by manager Claudio Ranieri they have been transmuted from base metal into gold. The total cost of the team is £55 million, only 2 million more than the £53 million Manchester United spent on one player, Ander Herrera.

Now after the joyful celebrations that took place in Leicester and echoed in other parts of the country by neutral football fans impressed with Leicester's endeavour, Ranieri will look forward to next season knowing that without significant investment to strengthen the squad it will be difficult to compete for the top prizes.

Since wage bill data was first released by the Premier League 16 years ago, the ledger shows that the clubs with

the biggest wage bills claim the top four places 80 percent of the time. Only twice, Manchester United in 2013 and Chelsea in 2001, have the team with the biggest payroll finished outside of the top four.

Leicester are by no means paupers.

Actually they are one of 17 teams on the Deloitte list of the world's 30 richest clubs, coming in at no 24 with revenues of £137m. Owner Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha features in the Forbes rich list at 714 in the world.

They are, however, competing against clubs that have far deeper pockets. Even with the £90 million winner's prize, £19m up on the club's take last season and the increased handout from the new Premier League broadcast rights deal,

which sees an increase in value of 71 percent from last season, Leicester do not have the same financial underpinning as the elite clubs they triumphed over this time.

It's been an invigorating season watching the big teams flounder against them and getting a timely comeuppance.

KEVIN



Football: go on, you know you just love it

#### SOCIALIST STANDARD INDEX FOR 2015

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### Exhibition Review continued

successful black artist' (it is available on YouTube). Success involves, for instance, being angry, which can be achieved by looking at a photo of Emmett Till in his coffin (Till was beaten and shot in Mississippi in 1955 at the age of fourteen after speaking to a married white woman). If all else fails, fall back on slavery, as white people lack a comparable shared cultural experience. White people, he claims, do not want to understand black artists, as this would mean the artists being just like the white



Modern advertisement for face-whitening cream

spectator. This is clearly satirical, but its aim is to comment on power relationships and hierarchies within the art world, since black artists (and women) are under-represented in galleries.

So an exhibition that different visitors will quite likely react to in different ways. But whether it is quite as significant as the curators claim is another question.

PB



# Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our Meetup site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

## LONDON

### Kentish Town

**Thursday 2 June, 8.00 p.m.**

Open Discussion on the EU Referendum  
Venue: Torriano Meeting House, 99 Torriano Avenue, London, NW5 2RX.

## WEST LONDON

**Saturday 4 June, 1.00pm.** Chiswick (Chiswick High Rd, outside Maks and Spencer) **Saturday 11 June, 12 noon** Hounslow (High St, near Treaty Centre)

**Saturday 18 June 12 noon** Kingston (Clarence St, opposite Marks and Spencer)  
Street stalls.

### Clapham

**Sunday 5 June, 3.00 p.m.**

FALLING STATUES AND SAFE SPACES: The "right" not to be offended as a threat to free expression.

Guest Speaker: Dr Edmund Griffiths (*Oxford Communist Corresponding Society*)

Venue: The Socialist Party's premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

**Sunday 19 June, 3.00 p.m.**

The EU referendum campaign: lies and counter-lies.  
Speakers: Adam Buick and Bill Martin  
Venue: The Socialist Party's premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

## SWANSEA

**Saturday 4 June from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 11 June, from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 18 June, from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 25 June, from 10.00 a.m.**  
Street Stall. The Quadrant, SA1 3QW.

## KENT

### FOLKESTONE

**Sunday 5 June, 2.00 p.m.**

Discussion Group  
Venue: The Guildhall Pub, 42 The Bayle, Folkestone, CT20 1SQ

**Saturday 25 June from 12.00 noon**

Street Stall  
Folkestone Town Hall, junction of Sandgate and Guildhall Street, CT20 1DY.

## CANTERBURY

**Saturday 11 June, from 12.00 Noon**

Street Stall. In the Parade pedestrian precinct

## LEEDS

**Saturday 11 June, 1.00 – 5.00 p.m.**

CROSSING BORDERS:

Nations, Migrations and Exploitations  
Day School on Capitalism in the Real World  
Venue: The Victoria Hotel, 28 Great George Street, Leeds, LS1 3DL

Speakers: Brian Gardner, Paul Bennett, Paddy Shannon.

## NORWICH

**Saturday 11 June, 12.00-4.00 pm**

East Anglian Regional Branch  
Business/discussion meeting  
Venue: The Heartsease Pub 180 Plumstead Road Norwich NR1 4JZ.

(Access to parking is through the Aldi car park).

## LONDON

Chiswick

**Tuesday 21 June, 8pm**

THE EURO-REFERENDUM: WHY YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE SIDES.

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 4JN.

## JULY 2016

### SWANSEA

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> July from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July, from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July, from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, from 10.00 a.m.**

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> July, from 10.00 a.m.**  
Street Stall. The Quadrant, SA1 3QW

## NORWICH

**Saturday 9 July, 3.00 pm**

Film 'Living Utopia (The Anarchists and the Spanish Revolution)' with introduction by Darren Poynton. Followed by discussion.  
Venue: The Reindeer Pub 10 Dereham Road Norwich NR2 4AY

## CANTERBURY

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> July from 12.00 Noon**

Street Stall. In the Parade pedestrian precinct

## WAKEFIELD Socialist History Group

**Saturday 16 July 12.00 Noon**

'TOLPUDDLE ... AND THE FIGHT FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS TODAY'

Socialist Party Speaker: Adam Buick  
Venue: The Red Shed, 18 Vicarage Street South, Wakefield, WF1 1QX  
Free admission. Free light buffet.

## EC Meeting

**Saturday 2 July**, Socialist Party's premises, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

## Folkestone area Discussion Group

If there is anyone interested in the formation of a Discussion Group in the Folkestone area, contact: [spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org](mailto:spgb.ksrb@worldsocialism.org) or phone: 07971 715569.

# Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

## Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

## Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



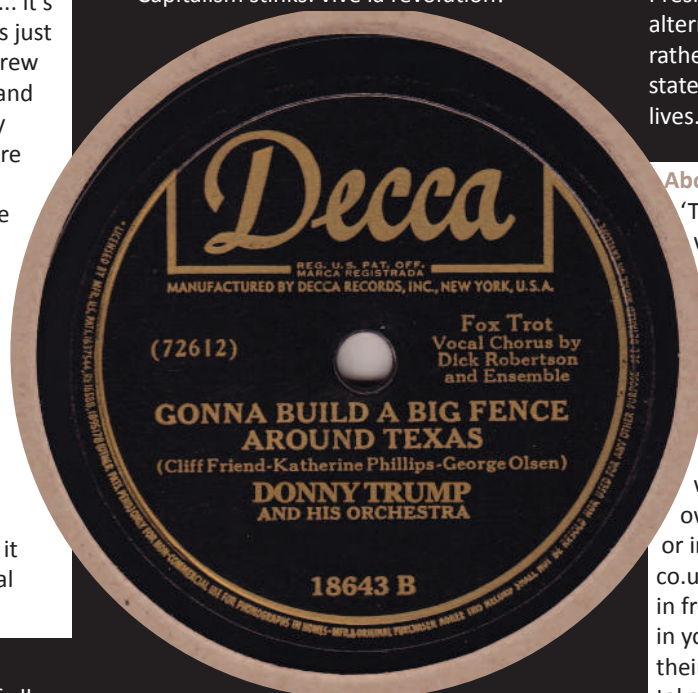
### Rage against the machine

'Decelles, a scientist at Princeton, has just published some very telling research that illustrates the broader social costs of unequal treatment by focusing on a very specific instance. She looked at what happens when those travelling in economy class on a plane pass through the first-class section on the way to their seat, and found that this encouraged bad behaviour.... Much less predictable was the discovery that when economy-class travellers have shuffled past the luxurious first-class seats on their way to the back of the plane, first-class travellers become more badly behaved too. In fact... it's possible the first-class traveller is just as prone to raging at the cabin crew as the one in economy, when – and this is the bit that matters – they both are made unavoidably aware of the difference in their status' (theguardian.com, 4 May). These remarks would come as no surprise to Marx. He made a similar observation: 'a house may be large or small; as long as the neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirement for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain'.

### Work, work, work

Socialism will not see the end of all boring work, but many occupations considered so will simply not exist as a result of automation or historical redundancy. A world of production for use not profit will have no use for banks, bookmakers, cashiers, economists, estate agents, loan sharks, security staff, stock brokers,

etc. This should be of interest to wage slaves everywhere, including 44-year-old Parisian Frédéric Desnard, who '... is demanding more than \$400,000 from his former employer, a perfume enterprise, as compensation for the boredom it allegedly caused. According to the Frenchman, the company should be held responsible for mental and other health damages' (washingtonpost.com, 5 May). Frederic also states that he was 'ashamed to be paid to do nothing, or nothing useful, is the preserve of the capitalist. Bored members of the 1 percent are welcome to apply for membership of the Socialist Party and do something more meaningful instead. Capitalism stinks: vive la révolution!



### Money first, medicine second

Who needs gods when we can make the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and bring back the dead? We can perform many other miracles, but capitalism rather than lack of ardent prayer gets in the way. We can cure many diseases once considered fatal. 'Hepatitis

C-related deaths reached an all-time high in 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Wednesday, surpassing total combined deaths from 60 other infectious diseases including HIV, pneumococcal disease and tuberculosis. The increase occurred despite recent advances in medications that can cure most infections within three months' (cnn.com, 4 May). Treatments are developed with profit not people in mind. Can't pay, can't have. This is the situation throughout the world. In central and west Africa as many as five million AIDS sufferers have no access to anti-retroviral drugs. Former South African President Thabo Mbeki promoted alternative remedies such as vinegar rather than ARVs, which saved the state's funds at cost of at least 300,000 lives.

### Abortion

'There are 49 countries in the world today where abortion is still completely illegal. In many more, it is legal only under the narrow pretext of saving a woman's life, and many other countries have strict regulations relating to abortion that ultimately take away a women's control over their own bodies even in cases of rape or incest' (indy100.independent.co.uk, 1 May). Celibate men dressed in frocks, often with more interest in young boys than women, expect their pronouncements on sex to be taken seriously. Lack of sex education and access to contraception as well as the pervasive poison of long dead generations are driving pregnancies among girls and women throughout the world. Lack of pre- and postnatal care for millions results in unnecessary deaths. You know the solution.

### FREE LUNCH

